

SUBJECT: Creating a pilot program to expand education partnerships in rural areas

COMMITTEE: Agriculture and Livestock — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Gonzalez Toureilles, B. Brown, Crabb, Heflin, Kleinschmidt, Swinford

0 nays

3 absent — Anderson, Hardcastle, Rios Ybarra

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 12 — 31-0

WITNESSES: (*On companion bill, HB 4245:*)
For — Jason Ford, Taylor Economic Development Corporation; Linda Holcombe, Texas Industrial Vocational Association; Richard Kolek, East Williamson County Higher Education Center, Legacy Early College High School; S. Chuck McCarter, East Williamson County Higher Education Center; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Trey Blocker, Texas Association of Manufacturers; David Duty, Texas Association of Community Schools; Denise Gentsch, Texas Seed Trade Association, Texas Agri-Women; Dominic Giarrantani, Texas Association of School Boards; Fred Khozein; Elizabeth Lippincott, Texas Border Coalition; Casey McCreary, Texas Association of School Administrators; John Nelson, Temple College at Taylor Foundation; Robin Painovich, Career & Technology Association of Texas; Jim Reaves, Texas Nursury & Landscape Association; Josh Sanderson, Association of Texas Professional Educators; Bob Turner, Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers, Coleman Economic Development Company; John Winegarner, Texas Cattle Feeders Association; Gerald Young, Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Drew Deberry, Texas Department of Agriculture)

DIGEST: SB 2405 would require the agriculture commissioner to establish by rule the rural workforce investment pilot program. The program would issue

grants for developing partnerships in rural areas among school districts, public junior colleges, public technical institutes, general academic teaching institutions, and business and industry to provide greater access to career and technical education and industry certification to high school students in rural areas.

Students participating in the program could receive at least 60 hours of college credit before high school graduation. The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) could not issue more than four grants in each state fiscal biennium.

A local workforce development board could apply to participate if it served a rural area of the state and met other qualifications prescribed by the commissioner. To receive a grant from the pilot program, an applicant would have to commit public or private matching funds in a percentage to be set by the commissioner. The percentage of matching funds would be based on the demonstrated economic capacity of the community to raise funds to match the grant.

A rural area would be defined as a county with a population of less than 100,000 or a municipality with a population of less than 50,000.

The TDA would coordinate with the Texas Workforce Commission, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas Education Agency in developing the pilot program.

The bill would not make an appropriation. Provisions in the bill that created a new governmental program or a new entitlement or that imposed a new duty on a governmental entity would not be mandatory during a fiscal period for which the Legislature had not made a specific appropriation to implement the provision.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2009.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 2405 would be a step toward expanding access to career and technical education and preserving the viability of rural communities in Texas. Partnerships like those proposed in the bill would support economic development in rural areas similar to those that exist in other areas of the state. Many rural areas suffer from lack of a skilled workforce to maintain

local industries. At the same time, students in rural school districts often have limited access to workforce education or certification. Students who graduated from such a program would have the ability to enter the workforce while staying in their local communities.

The program would develop partnerships among school districts, junior colleges, four-year universities, and business and industry to provide greater access to career and technical education and industry certification to high school students in these areas. Many areas simply do not have a pool of candidates to work in industry and manufacturing. Rural Texas also has needs for trained healthcare workers and service industry workers. Some areas have experienced growth as vacation destinations, so there is a growing need for workers in the hospitality sectors.

The pilot program is modeled after the education collaborative East Williamson County Higher Education Center in Taylor. This is a multi-institution teaching center, also called a “MIT-C,” which involves Taylor ISD, Hutto ISD, Temple College, Texas State Technical College in Waco, Texas Tech University, and Tarleton State University Central Texas. Since the MIT-C was established, businesses have shown an increased interest in locating to this area of the state because of the pool of students who are able to get education and certification in industry training.

Other agencies have had similar programs, but no one has focused primarily on rural areas. TDA is in a unique position through its Rural Economic Development division and its strong relationship with rural communities to make a positive impact with a grant program.

TDA has identified several potential funding sources through federal rural development funding, as well as stimulus funding, for creative education opportunities. With the framework provided in the bill, TDA would be able to craft the program to access the workforce, economic development and education funding on several levels.

The program has great potential for success because it would require a local commitment in the form of matching funds but also would allow flexibility at the grassroots level to devise a collaborative that met the unique needs of a local community, like a “grow-your-own” program.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

According to the LBB, the bill would cost \$800,000 in fiscal 2010 and \$800,000 each biennium through fiscal 2014.

The House companion bill, HB 4245 by Keffer, was reported favorably, as substituted, by the Agriculture and Livestock Committee on April 16 and placed on the May 11 General State Calendar, where no further action was taken.